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Summary: Draco Malfoy has some news for his long-time girlfriend Astoria Greengrass, but he's not quite sure how to express his current thoughts. Maybe a date to one of their frequented cafes will help him say what he needs to say.

Next

****AN: ****This is Beater 2 of the Chudley Cannons checking in for Round 1 of Season 4 of the QLFC.

****Prompts: ****Describe a Death Eater on a date. 4. "I really do like the pants," (dialogue) and 5. Espresso (word)

****Word Count (before AN): ****2,203 words

I want to thank MaryandMerlin, AKA my wonderful team captain and beta for this round.

And also, I do not own any of this world. It belongs to J.K. I'm just lucky enough to dabble in it.

* * *

><p>What was he thinking, showing up in Muggle London dressed like a bloody wizard?<p>

He wasn't thinking, that's what. He was doing what his mother asked. Because she'd been lonely and tired and needed something to control. Like his bloody wardrobe, apparently.

Draco looked down at his carefully tailored pants and sighed. Stupid pants. Stupid robe, stupid Muggles, stupidâ€œ

"And what are you scowling at now?"

Draco looked up, his eyes finding the face that went with his favorite voice. At least she wore Muggle clothes. Probably because she was smart enough to know anyone dressed as he was would get stared at profusely. She looked lovely, stepping closer to him. Long-sleeved laced top and black jeans. Draco hated wearing jeans. But on Astoria, they looked so damned refined.

She slid into the seat opposite him, dropping her oversized handbag and umbrella on the ground beside her. He picked a corner café about three minutes from the Ministry of Magic, one he had often frequented in the past two years while dealing with some of his legal issues. That's how he discovered it existed. When he told Astoria the name, she asked if he really wanted to go back now that things were settled. He told her it had the best cupcakes in town, and, after all, she loved cupcakes.

Her hair was pulled back into a braid. Her emerald green eyes lit up as she smiled at him. Quickly, she leant across the table, placing her mouth on his. Draco felt the familiar rush of adrenaline that came when he touched Astoria. Even in those few seconds, lips touching lips, he felt like his bones were on fire.

Unfortunately, that made what he was about to do all the more difficult.

"So," she sank back in her chair, "what're you scowling at?"

"I don't scowl."

"Sure you do," Astoria grabbed at one of his hands. Draco laced his fingers through hers, letting their palms rest together on the table. A little hand hug. (Astoria's words, of course. He would never call it that.) "You scowl all the time. I wouldn't be surprised if your face were printed next to the word 'scowl' in the dictionary."

"I don't scowl," he repeated, picking up his cup of coffee with this free hand. Over the rim of his mug, he could see Astoria smirking.

"Fine, have it your way then." Her head turned to the window beside them. "It's raining hard out there today. I might have to splurge for a double shot of espresso."

He squeezed her hand, lightly, bringing her attention back to him. "No need to splurge, Story. I invited you here. I'll pay."

"Draco?"

"Story. Please." Why was it that whenever he wanted to sound strong and assertive, he always seemed to come off as whiny and stubborn? All he wanted was to pay for his girlfriend's drink. Why did she always have to be difficult about it? Why wouldn't she let him spoil her the way she deserved? He'd been a right prat the first few years of their relationship—Draco had, after all, gone through a lot of things when he was seventeen—and he needed to make it up to her. Every small gesture counted. Every single—

"Draco, I love that you love me. And I love you. A lot. I love our lunch dates during the week. They're my favorite, really," Astoria

smiled. Then her head tilted to the side, and Draco knew what was coming. "But, for Rowena's sake, darling! Let me pay for myself once in a while. It's only fair."

Draco gulped down the last of his coffee. The waitress stopped by then, and with one last look from Astoria, Draco conceded. Because he was about to change everything, so why not let the beautiful woman in front of him think she won their on-going tiff about paying during dates? As Astoria ordered, Draco mulled over just how he wanted to phrase what he was about to say. It wasn't exactly something that popped up in normal conversation, was it? He could be blunt about it; that method had worked before when he told Astoria of his shady past and his parents' divorce.

No. Not for this. This needed poise, confidence. An air of tact and grace.

"You've got a little dribble on your chin." Astoria's free thumb was rubbing at a spot just under the edge of Draco's bottom lip.

Yeah. Tact. Poise. All that bloody nonsense.

Draco shifted in his seat, which only reminded him how he dressed that morning, which only made him feel the tiny beads of sweat pooling on his neck and underarms. Were his robes strangling him? Did the waitress turn off the bloody air cooler or whatever it was called?

He pulled his hand away from Astoria's, letting it land in his hair. Since he began his residency at St. Mungo's, he'd kept his platinum locks short and neat. He didn't have the time to worry about such things as perfectly styled hair anymore. His mother nearly had a stroke when she saw him for the first time, but Astoria said she liked it.

She even spent most of their evening petting his head, telling Draco he felt as soft as a pygmy puff. They fell asleep on her couch watching some awful Muggle movie about old men resurrecting dinosaurs. Astoria liked those kinds of pictures, an awful trait she picked up from her dad. But Draco always let her pick their form of entertainment, and somehow they always ended up on her couch watching trash telly and laughing till they fell asleep.

Sometimes they didn't fall asleep, and those were the best nights he stayed over at her flat.

He was blushing now and his hands were folded neatly in front of him and his mug was empty and now he had nothing to focus on instead of his Astoria and he couldn't look at her. Not now. Not when he was imagining staying awake all night with her, skin on skin, kissing sweetlyâ€|

Not when he was about to drop an explosive, stupendous, gargantuan, bomb onâ€|

"You seem distracted today."

Astoria's espresso had arrived, along with a refill on his coffee. Draco took the cup and sipped, burning his tongue in the process. "Bloody pissâ€|"

"Draco!" Astoria started laughing. Her oval face swept the room. "Good thing there aren't any kids around. What's up with you today?"

"Story, Iâ€" his mouth was frozen open. Merlin, why did she have to look so beautiful? The sun was finally peeking through the clouds, the rays glinting off her raven-colored braid, and the rain slowing to a light patter against the cafÃ©'s roof. She had one freckle on her nose that he loved to kiss in the mornings.

Well, the mornings when he was with her. Not all mornings were spent waking up warm, her arms snuggled around him. Most mornings were spent in his bedroom, miles away, near that bloody Muggle train that zipped by at four every damn morning.

Draco's mouth closed. Finally. Astoria was still watching, waiting. Her calmness was palpable, so much so, Draco knew he could do this.

He could just say it.

"I don't want to date anymore," he breathed out, letting his lungs deflate and then inflate again. The weight was off his chest, now, circling somewhere between his mouth and Astoria's ears. As soon as it landed in its designated location, the weight pulled down the corners of her lips. Her brow knit together in the middle, and that one solitary freckle crinkled.

"Come again?"

"Wait," Draco sat up straighter, his pants tightening around his waist. "Wait, I said that wrong."

"What did you mean, Draco? That is, of course, if you had the chance to say it again. And, uh, obviously if you wanted to. Of course." She was trying to hide the hurt she felt. He knew it. She always asked questions like that, like she didn't really want an answer but she knew something else was coming. Astoria always jumbled her words when she was too afraid to hear what came next.

Draco smiled, his own anxiety finally retreating, because this was why he wanted to stop dating. This girl made him want, well, more. "Story, relax. I want to be with you. I want to be with you every single second of every single day. I don't want to argue over paying for things, because I want to share everything with you. This dating thing, it's okay, but it's not enough. I want more. I want what's next for us."

Astoria visibly relaxed, her eyes lighting up. "Oh, thank God. I thought you wereâ€" "

"I know. I know what you thought," he smiled bigger. "You've always been the one better at expressing your feelings."

"True." Then she gasped. Draco watched as her relaxed face turned into her thinking face. He had first seen that face sitting in the Hogwarts library, buried in a Potions book. He sat down in front of her then and watched as her mind raced through the pages until she reached the end. Astoria had looked up at him, a gangly fourth year

Ravenclaw, and told him to get lost. He was only sixteen, but he couldn't wait to talk to her again. Now, however, she almost had the same look on her face as she did back then. "What do you mean 'next?'"

"I mean the next step. We've been together, what? Almost six years now. I want to stop dating; I want you to move in with me."

Air audibly escaped her lips. "Move in, that's all?"

"Yeah. Why?" Then he knew. He could see the terror in her eyes, and he started to laugh. "Did you really think that I wasâ€"

"Oh, you very well know what I thought you were doing," she hunched forward, finishing up the rest of her espresso. "Stop laughing!"

But she was laughing too and everything was okay and there was never any reason to panic. Draco blamed his mother for that. She told him it would be a very hard conversation to have, that it might come as a surprise, and the girl might not accept. Then she handed him his ruddy wizarding robes and wished him good luck.

But his mother didn't know Astoria the way he did.

"If I were to proposeâ€"and we both know we aren't ready for that kind of next stepâ€"do you really think I'd do it _here_?" Draco finally composed himself.

"No," Astoria said after a few moments, "of course not. You'd probably take me to my parent's house and do it by the apple tree out in the yard."

His head snapped up from the sip he was about to take. _How'd she know?!_

"I'm right, aren't I?" She crossed her arms over her chest, a smug look on her face.

"Anyway," he pushed on, "I didn't hear a yes to my earlier statement."

"That's because I am _not_ _moving_ into that hole you call home, love."

"Ouch, Story. There goes any semblance of pride I had left."

"I didn't finish," her tongue rested between her teeth, teasing. Soon her hand had found his again in another little hand hug. Head cocked to the side. A smile playing on her lips. Fire in her eyes. "You're moving into _my_ _flat_. It's closer to Mungo's _and_ _the_ Ministry. It's bigger, it's quieter, and you practically live there already."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Okay." And he couldn't stop smiling.

When they both finished their drinks and a cupcake each, they stood

to leave. Draco planned to apparate to his own flat to start moving his things in at once. There wasn't any point in waiting.

Astoria opened her umbrella for the two of them to stand under. She linked her arm through Draco's, and said, "Does this mean that this was our last date ever?"

He kissed the top of her head, "Not necessarily. No. I'll always spoil you when you let me."

"Mmm, yes," she giggled, "spoiled. That's me. Oh so spoiled."

"It's true," he teased.

"Says the man who let his mum pick his outfit today."

He stopped walking. "How'd you even know that?"

"Oh please. You would never wear something all wizard-y unless she told you to, love," Astoria kicked at a puddle. "Either way, tell your mum I really do like the pants. Preferably on _our_ bedroom floor."

"Right," Draco relinked their arms. "I'll relay that message immediately."

"Good. It's been such a long time since Narcissa and I had a good chat."

He rolled his eyes. "I love you, Astoria."

Draco waited for a 'What? No Story this time?' but instead he got a very serious, "I love you, too."

A group of Muggle teenagers were staring at him now, no doubt questioning the wardrobe Astoria so lovingly teased him about.

But let them stare. He had the girl of his dreams beside him and a real future to look forward to. He hadn't had that kind of hope in a long time. So, whatever happened next, Draco knew he'd make them the best damn years of his life.

End
file.